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THE SCHOOL OF LIFE.—BY ANNA MARY HOWITT.

CHAPTER V.—PART II.

MORE than a twelvemonth has elapsed since the death of Mrs. Mordant, and Leonard is living once more in England. This second shock had passed over him, leaving but slight, yet significant, external sign. The fervour of creation which had fired him among the Alps had never returned; a strange apathy devoured him. Sketches, it is true, were struck off, then days were spent in dreaming; and great works were thrown aside with disgust, after a few weeks' labour. Leonard had received various commissions, among them one from Lord de Calis, the uncle of Honoria; but the very necessity of fulfilling an engagement, in the morbid state of Leonard's mind, deprived him of the power to work. This strange apathy extended not alone towards his own pictures, but towards the works of others. He rarely now felt joy at the sight of picture, statue, or print—everywhere he seemed alone to recognise failure, or weariness of spirit, or conceit, or affectation. His sole impulse was towards nature—his innate, enthusiastic adoration of her became his consoler and joy-giver. Days, weeks, and months, were spent in this worship; and he commenced various studies, elaborated with a patience and love unutterable of her prodigal beauty, even in her humblest walks. He painted masses of lush vegetation down by brook-sides; golden calthas; and, later in the year, the quaint arrow-head, with its broad leaves, mingling with the rose-tinted and graceful butomas; the snowy meadow-sweet waving above an undergrowth of azure forget-me-not, and crimson loose-strife, and majestic typha, and gleaming Aaron's-rod; tangles in woods and hedge-rows, and bits of moor-land, he painted with waving cotton-rush, pale grass-of-Parnassus, and dusky crimson sun-dew; and dry heathery banks, gleaming with their myriad of flowers. But exquisite as were these faithful, loving transcripts, to himself they gave no joy. Rarely even were the studies completed; for his keen perception of nature's perfection sickened him with the imperfection of all human copies. For hours would he lie in the grass, glorying in the marvellous beauty around him, and wandering away by subtle degrees into obscure and mystical regions of thought, which were unfolding their portals to him.

Lucretia marked with the most lively anxiety this alarming apathy; but to her hand seemed to be denied the key with which to unlock his heart. Nay, the very anxiety she expressed seemed but to estrange him from her. We need not say how deep a pain this was to Lucretia; but like all pain, she bore it silently in her heart.

To her infinite surprise, she learnt through John Wetherley, who had become a more frequent visitor at the Gaywoods than Leonard, that their old friend was engaged to be married to Agnes Singleton the authoress! Lucretia believed now that the mystery was solved; and painful in the extreme as Leonard's silence was to her, and as his withdrawal from their old intimacy had been—she with her whole soul now rejoiced in what she believed must work in his life a change for happiness! Yet, she had read Agnes Singleton's books—and clever, brilliant, profound in thought as they were, there was yet a certain character of hardness—an absence of *love*—which excited an astonishment in Lucretia's mind as to the fascination which Leonard could have found in the writer, and as to the sympathy which possibly could exist between her and Leonard. Lucretia knew, both from Leonard himself, and from John, that Honoria Pierrpoint having become the purchaser of the "Balder," had, shortly after Leonard's return, called at his studio, and with a cordiality irresistible, invited him down to her little villa at Box Hill, where Leonard had become a frequent visitor, the whole tone of Honoria's circle, the nobility, and beauty of the atmosphere around her, falling like balm upon his morbid soul. All this Lucretia knew, and wove her own romance upon these slight premises. But

the reader must be made acquainted with a little more detail.

Lucretia was right in her judgment as to Agnes Singleton's works. A hardness, an intense pride, and a scorn of much that the world considers sacred, were harsh features in the writings of Agnes—and were harsh features in her nature also. Intellect, and not love, had been her divinity. Battling towards a free intellectual atmosphere through the ranks of prejudice belonging to a peculiarly narrow sect of religionists, she had encased herself in an armour of scorn and pride; she had gained immense power of will, self-confidence, and independence in the struggle; but had left behind her her kindred, and the gentle grace which peculiarly belongs to womanhood, and which may render strength the more glorious when united to it. She professed herself to despise all such graces, but within her soul lay the germs of love and of gentleness, spite of the rude, hard encrustation of pride and scorn.

The picture of "Balder" had spoken to her intellect and to her imagination; and expressing her earnest admiration to Leonard upon their first meeting at Honoria's, she had unconsciously waxed more than ordinarily eloquent, and discovering in her listener an unusual intellectual sympathy, the whole powers of her mind had been drawn forth by the magic of sympathy, and Leonard had from the first hour of their intercourse become dazzled and fascinated by a being totally unlike any thing he had previously encountered or imagined.

He had become fascinated, dazzled, filled with a deep interest, was bound by some potent spell; but was it the spell of love? He breathed freer in the presence of Agnes than now in the presence of Lucretia, and cast aside the dark memories of the past—and questioned not of the future—but had Agnes touched the core of his soul, which, overflowing with love for all things, even the humblest, should for a bride have flamed up with a fire, even as a fire of sacrifice?

In Agnes the germ of love, within the core of her being, had, as if struck by an enchanter's wand, sprung forth into sudden vigor, and waxed daily stronger and fiercer, surrounding her even as with a halo of gracefulness and tenderness, at least in the eyes of Leonard; whilst, at the same time, her own strong and vigorous life developed itself yet more strikingly through this new impulse. Agnes never once attempted to conceal from herself the affection with which Leonard inspired her.

"It matters little to me whether it be returned," said Agnes once to Honoria; "the fact of a new and powerful influence swaying my spirit as a mighty wind rushing over the earth sways and changes the atmospheric currents, is the great thing. It will have a marvellous influence upon my work, Honoria; all strong passions, all experience—aye, bitterness, martyrdom, are necessary baptisms for the life of the teacher." And Agnes, for the sake of her work and her career, would willingly have gone to the stake. Her affection for Leonard—*his* even for *her*, should that ever exist—was but a secondary object, the one which was of importance as serving the primal object.

Honoria, with all her peculiarly bold opinions—with all her regard for Leonard, and her love for Agnes—was alarmed by the feelings of this singular girl, and often pondered into what course fate would bend these strong wills. And thus months had passed on, and, to the surprise of themselves no less than to the surprise of Honoria and Lucretia, Agnes and Leonard had plighted their troth! In Agnes their engagement had only increased the dominant impulse of her soul—pursuit of success in the career which she had set before herself; in Leonard—his apathy.

John, also, has undergone various revolutions of soul since he and Leonard have met. For years—as we have seen at Lambelli's, then at the academy, and even within the walls of the Exhibition itself—had the genius of Leonard ever been arousing him to action, speaking to him of an excellence yet unattained. At each contact with Leonard's spiritual influence, John had endured peculiar sensations, the most generous acknowledgment of Leonard's superiority, the highest delight in his excellence; yet, as regarded himself, mingled with dogged determination to attain an equal excellence, if not a

have been the very first to have yielded the palm to Leonard, and well knew that *his* picture stood far below anything that Leonard would ever paint. He respected Honoria's judgment which did *not* praise the "Paul and Virginia," yet *one* word of praise from her would have been nectar and ambrosia. If such had been the influence of Leonard through his works upon John, how much more intense were the feelings which Leonard in person produced. Leonard's excessive refinement of taste, which rarely permitted praise to escape his lips—his coldness towards John's artistic powers—his criticism so



LEONARD AND HONORIA IN THE STUDIO OF JOHN WETHERLEY.

superior one—the bitterest disgust, self-contempt, and hatred, of what he already had done. In the Exhibition, when he saw his picture, his beloved "Paul and Virginia," he could have torn it down from the wall; he could have trampled it indignantly beneath his feet, as he had done the comforter of his poor old grandmother; a thousand feelings flashed before him, and filled his soul with sickness. Honoria's enthusiastic admiration of the "Balder" he echoed with the most thorough truthfulness; yet each word of praise cut him to the soul, filled him with an agony of jealousy: yet he himself would

marvellously just, yet so cutting—his breadth and cultivation of mind, and marvellous play of fancy—the perfect ease with which he executed things that were in John's eyes exquisitely beautiful, yet which he himself criticised as keenly as he did the works of others, or flung aside with contempt—and, above all, the respect and admiration with which Honoria regarded him, the evident delight she took in his society, and with which she preached him up to John, aroused storms of the most contending emotions within John's breast. Many a time, leaving Leonard's presence, he has rushed home, pulled

forth his pictures or his sketches, gazed at them grinding his teeth, then fling them indignantly from him. Has been known even utterly to destroy a picture or sketch, and, rushing up and down his room in a state of extraordinary excitement, has denounced himself as a blockhead, an idiot, a fool, and terminated his invectives with exclaiming, "Yes, that Hale is right; he is a genius, a great, a noble and grand genius; the breath of the divine artist has breathed upon him! I—I:—I'm only a lad taken out of a turnip-field; let me never forget that. And what means have I possessed for the expansion of my mind? Miss Pierrpoint? Of course Hale and she can have grounds of sympathy which she cannot have with me. I'm but the lad out of the turnip-field, and am indebted to her for all the little I have learnt; but oh, for one, no not *word*, but expression of admiration, of pride—no—in my work, from her by look or emotion in her beautiful face. Well, Hale is greater than I ever shall be, but that's God's work, and not Miss Pierrpoint's; and if he skins me alive with speaking the truth, I ought to thank him for it, were I only *morally great*. Aye, flay me alive, Hale! I'll profit by every wound you inflict upon me; there is the mighty, the increasing love of nature and of my art within me, and they may achieve for me excellence, though it be a different excellence to that of my tormentor!"

And John's picture's in the next exhibition truly proved, to himself, as well as to others, that he had profited by this "flaying."

Honorina even acknowledged the superiority of these pictures to the "Paul and Virginia;" but the vanity of John suffered, as usual, from Honorina's words. John's soul expanded immeasurably beneath the influence of Leonard, and with this expansion awoke a perception of Honorina's greatness of character and beauty of soul, which swallowed up every lesser emotion. What had been John's love for L'Allegro—a mere romantic dream? He now stood upon the brink of a mighty passion—the more potent, because reason, duty, honour, all admonished him of danger.

Such was the position of affairs when we find assembled at Honorina's Italian villa at Box Hill, upon a lovely autumnal evening, Leonard, John, Agnes, and Honorina, together with Mr. Pierrpoint and Honorina's companion, the elderly lady dressed in black, with the silver hair and quiet smile.

The four had been spending a day, worthy to have been celebrated in the "Decameron." Leonard and John had been painting in the woods, Honorina and Agnes either sitting with them reading aloud poetry, or conversing; or they had wandered away by themselves through the woods, returning to find Mr. Pierrpoint and the old lady arrived, together with an abundant repast, spread out by Honorina's servants beneath the trees—and decorated by the hands of the young painters with garlands of richly tinted leaves. Returning home as evening approached, with sketches and sheaves of leaves and flowers as glorious trophies, Honorina had coffee served up in her little library, the French windows of which opened upon a low terrace, and commanded a magnificent expanse of woodland scenery—now bathed in the warm rays of an autumnal sunset.

The gayest tone pervaded the little circle. John alone was silent. He never yet had been able entirely to overcome the chill which Mr. Pierrpoint's manner struck to his heart; besides which, his love for Honorina throughout this poetical day had waxed even deeper and stronger, and to speak in her presence made his words come thick and incoherent.

"That turn of expression again reminds me marvellously of my old friend, Mordant, the poet. Poor Mordant!" suddenly remarked Mr. Pierrpoint, turning towards his daughter as Leonard ceased speaking with an animation somewhat unusual with him. "At various times have I been struck with a resemblance between Mr. Hale and that gifted, that unfortunate man. Had Mr. Hale, now, been Mordant's son, the world would have exclaimed, what an extraordinary family resemblance! For my own part," pursued Mr. Pierrpoint, "being a believer in the transmission of the same type through many generations, I dare say, could we but obtain

the clue, consanguinity might be discovered to account for this resemblance—which is not alone mental, but physical. Yes, the more I recall Mordant's features, the more does the resemblance haunt me. What a termination was his to the most promisingly brilliant of careers!" continued Honorina's father, musingly. Then turning towards poor Leonard, who, with his coffee-cup in his trembling hand, had turned towards the open window, and appeared absorbed in contemplation of the glorious landscape, "I believe you once expressed yourself as acquainted with the writings of the man to whom I refer. Brilliant, caustic, at times rising into sublimity, some of the finest and most eloquent writing in our language, in my opinion, has flowed from his pen; yet he has left behind him merely fragments: still they are gems of the purest water and deserve a setting of the finest gold. It was a favourite idea of mine, years ago, to collect and edit an edition of poor Mordant's works, prefacing it with my own recollections of the man; for circumstances and congeniality of taste had, at one time, brought us much in contact. But more pressing business always interfered. Besides which, one spur was soon lost—the benefit which such an edition might have been to his family; for his poor widow soon became an incurable maniac, and his son, I understood, died. The child was a child of great promise, I remember, but sadly neglected; and you, Honorina, must still recollect having once seen Mrs. Mordant—that poor mad woman—at the Hellings! Yes, she, indeed, had endured enough misery to destroy any reason. Now, Mr. Hale, if ever you should feel inclined, you and Mr. Wetherley there, to undertake the illustration of Mordant's poems, I should feel greatly inclined to carry out my scheme. It would be a labour of love which you, Mr. Hale, can comprehend." Mr. Pierrpoint pausing, as if for a sign of assent from Leonard, and a silence having crept over the little company, he, by an almost superhuman effort, found his lips replying. "It is singular, but I have already made various sketches, illustrating, or suggested by, these poems. I shall be happy to place them at your disposal, sir." Leonard's voice startled himself, there was such a hoarse sepulchral echo in its tones.

"That man possessed the most extraordinary power of fascination I ever encountered," pursued Mr. Pierrpoint, unobservant of anything peculiar in Leonard's voice. "The actions he was guilty of, had they been performed by another, would have disgusted and alienated his friends a dozen times over, and have been pronounced downright dishonest; but even over his creditors his magic extended itself for years. It was only the old story over again; and I, for one, was always willing to help on the good within him, as it was a rarer good, after all, than the generality of good in honest men. I willingly closed my eyes to the evil, endeavouring to close also the eyes of others, for such a genius does not come among us every day."

"Father," said Honorina, suddenly rising, as if propelled by an unseen influence, and with her whole countenance flushed with emotion, "pardon me, but from *your* lips never should I have expected to hear such words. The evil in a rarely-gifted being, such as men unite in pronouncing this Mordant to have been, called upon all true friends of his—all true worshippers of genius—all high-minded and high-souled men—to have opened their eyes especially to this evil, to have probed it to the core, to have removed temptation if you will from the sorely tempted, but *never* to have sanctioned *two* codes of morality, one for the gifted and one for the ungifted. From Him to whom much is given much will be required: and neither can the personal happiness of the genius himself be secured by deviation from the law of rectitude handed down to us by the Divine, nor yet can the stigma be removed from him in the eyes of the world. We, father, to whom is granted the appreciation of the rare gift of genius—who cherish it as breath from God Himself; who regard the poet, the painter, as a high-priest in the temple of nature—must *require* from the priest purity of an especially high order. What unction in his words—in his teachings—if the seal of conviction stamp not his life! The Cabbalah says that a lower and far more

revolting degree of uncleanness attaches to the moral or physical impurity of a priest, of a holy man, or of a vessel devoted to a sacred use, than to the impurity of a man or vessel of lower sanctity. Especially is this true with regard to the world's estimate of the high vocation of its teachers. Far be hardness of heart and uncharitableness from us; but let a higher code of purity inscribe itself upon the tablet of our souls;—let us not aid in the erection of whited sepulchres, without all beauty, within desolation and rottenness; for the desolation within must come forth, and with its pestilential breath cast horror and contempt upon the beauty! John, Mr. Hale, Agnes—you who are going forth as priests to serve in this temple, to offer up before the Divine, and to raise the Holy of Holies before the gaze of his people—preserve white and spotless your garments, because your *souls* are undefiled!

A strong emotion passed through her listeners, and Honoria, with glowing cheeks, her eyes brilliant with tears, and with the swan-like movement of her round white neck, stepped forth upon the terrace. "Let us breathe a cooler air," said she; "and John, I want to speak with you about something before you leave us this evening."

Mr. Pierrpoint and the old lady, however, remained seated in the library, and exchanging a look of admiration of Honoria as she stepped forth, followed by her friends.

Honoria and John walked on silently side by side till they entered a pleached walk of roses, which stretched across one side of the lawn. Leonard and Agnes had betaken themselves to the banks of a little stream, which flowed through the garden, and across whose glossy darkling mirror a pair of swans approached.

"John," said Honoria, after they in silence had paced side by side the mossy turf of this shady bowery walk, "I am a keen reader of the human soul, and yours I have long read as a book; and for sometime upon its pages, especially throughout this day, I have read there of a great and mighty emotion, which, unless it bend itself into its *true* path, can only render your life a wreck and a mistake. Did a similar emotion live within my soul, John, I should scorn to permit mere worldly considerations to deter my acknowledgment of its existence. True, earnest, and unselfish love, I place among the very rarest and the most sacred gifts of God. This, you know me sufficiently well, instantly to believe. Because I have faith in your candour, your strength and uprightness, do I say all this. I should not say it to an ordinary man, for I have but a very mean opinion of man's moral nature in general. A true, firm, and devoted friendship do I feel for you; and your success in the world, your living out the artist's life, such as I believe this life may be lived out, is one of the most earnest desires of my heart. Do not let us be disappointed in this desire! But to achieve such a life, my friend, no worm of hopeless misery must gnaw at the roots of your life—strength, soul and body, must be yours! Sorrow, and the baptism of fire coming to steadfast souls, bring alone strength and a morrow of joy. I must have you put the curb of reason and truth upon your imagination—she must not, as a demon, drag you down into hell, and then, as an angel, lead you up into heaven; or if she do this, she must alone mirror my image to you in the heaven, as your stern judge and guide! 'Paint each countenance as though it were the countenance of your Beloved!' I once heard a great master say to his scholars—'let each fold of drapery, each flower, each leaf, each gem, be as if it belonged to your Beloved.' So say I to you, John, your passion must wreak itself upon your art; if you have the true artist's soul, the struggle will not be so difficult. Love of your art must be greater than love of me. Were I your wife, John, I would have it so, much more as your friend!"

John walked beside this singular Honoria, a most extraordinary tempest of feeling raging within him. "Ah, if she loved, if she *ever* had loved, how differently would she have reasoned," thought he to himself; "how cold, how unsympathetic her words; how far, far from her calm realm of reason is my soul. Whilst her rich voice fills my ear—whilst

I am in her presence—I desire only to feel that one vast bliss. I would learn the universe from her wise lips. I would lay my soul in her hand, and she should guide it as a child—oh, to be of service to her, to remain near her—even as a menial!" And how much he owed her. And had he not always loved her, long, long years? Was it not love which, nursing within his breast, when the ignorant child had bowed his face among the flowers of the Hellings wood? Alas! poor John, were you not almost falling into depths of folly as absurd as in days of yore; are you, then, grown no wiser with years—and with the remembrance of sweet L'Allegro? In a bewilderment John walked, his hands convulsively clasped, and cold, with a great trembling which shivered down him, his face very white, and no voice proceeding from his firmly-set lips. He heard Honoria's words clearly and distinctly pouring forth; and a warmth seemed to flow forth from, and a glory to encircle her whole being; but the words conveyed no meaning to his soul—only at a later time did they, heard and buried within his memory, come forth and show themselves to his understanding, and each word was a word of steel. At length Honoria, suddenly pausing, fixed her noble, frank countenance with her clear eyes upon him, and stretching forth her warm, jewelled hands, took his clasped, trembling ones, and spoke with a voice which trembled for one moment with emotion, then clear as a trumpet awoke his intellect:—"Pardon, pardon, John, for pain caused you so unintentionally, so painfully to myself. Henceforth, we stand upon the rock of truth—our friendship must become purer and stronger; never more doubt my faith in you, or in your genius. I have always been *severe*, because I am ambitious for you. Show me that you can conquer your weakness, your strongest temptation; show me by your work, that I have given you strength—even though I have given you pain. We will avoid meeting for some time; but our friendship shall not, must not suffer!"

It was already dusk, and looking around her, Honoria said, with her usual abrupt decision: "You had better return to town to-night; my carriage shall take you. Master your feelings sufficiently to permit you to bid adieu to my father and Mr. Hale. I will explain in a satisfactory manner your departure. Remember I shall most anxiously await the evidences of your conquest!" And, leaving poor John speechless and heart-broken within the dusk of the beautiful garden, she glided towards the house.

It was towards the end of March of the following spring, that Honoria first acknowledged the battle that the soul of John Wetherley had fought. With a flushed cheek Honoria, clad in her riding-dress, entered John Wetherley's studio. No John was painting there: but Leonard stood before a nearly completed picture upon an easel. He gazed at Honoria's excited countenance, as she entered, without surprise; but with a strange mingling of sadness and almost of sternness. Standing aside, he placed a chair before the picture, motioning her to be seated. Honoria's eyes resting upon the picture, she clasped her hands, and bowing her face, tears of a bitterness such as never before had fallen from Honoria's eyes, fell glittering towards the earth.

Beneath the picture, written as if in letters of blood, she read the words—

"Love is Endurance, Martyrdom, and Victory."

The scene was a dim dungeon. At the foot of a dark row of heavy columns stood a rack; upon its bars reclined the youthful and wan figure of a man. His face shone with the glory of a victorious love, and he raised one hand as if blessing; instruments of torture lay around; an open Bible was pierced with a bloody sword. The two hardened torturers fell aside, covering their faces, as if blinded and stricken by that countenance of love. The other arm of the martyr encircled a woman, who, clinging to him firm and calm, supported her husband in her arms, supporting him through the fierce pangs of his suffering, bathing his parched brain, and kissing his pale cheek—enduring martyrdom of spirit to soothe his pangs by her strength and love.